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ABSTRACT

Increasingly involved in curricular concerns, boards of education can determine the educational goals of the community by using the Educational Goals Assessment (EGA) and thus set priorities when cutbacks are necessary. The EGA is composed of four questionnaires listing 275 learning goals describing knowledge, attitudes, or physical skills and covering 13 school subjects and 11 life areas. Respondents are asked to rate how important it is for students to learn each goal, the importance of the schools themselves teaching it, and whether the goal should be required for high school graduation. Two "games" requiring allocation of time and money among the life areas are included. Graduation requirements most frequently chosen by school systems using the EGA include computing accurately, knowing mathematical fundamentals, reading with understanding, and writing correctly. School systems can use responses to make curricula attractive to more consumers, deemphasizing performing arts, for example, and stressing art appreciation. In order to serve community needs, school boards should formulate policies recognizing their involvement in curriculum development and research, instructional programs, and what learning will be required for graduation and how it will be measured. (MJL)

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Updating SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES

Volume 14/Number 6/June-July 1983

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Assess your goals to set priorities

by Regina H. Paul

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Most school systems in recent years have been forced by a variety of economic and social factors to reduce school expenditures. Even in school systems experiencing growth in enrollments, inflation has necessitated close scrutiny of expenditures in order to live within their respective adopted budgets. To keep the budget under control, some school leaders have snipped or/even slashed at the very core of education—the curriculum—as part of their on-going belt-tightening measures.

In so doing, portions of the instructional program have undergone sometimes dramatic changes. Some school systems, for instance, have reduced or eliminated advanced math and science classes, elementary school art and music, and foreign language programs (not to mention interscholastic sports, summer recreation programs, and a host of related curriculum programs).

How should you go about determining the curriculum for your schools? What policies can be most helpful to you and others throughout your community as decisions are reached? What sources of information are available to assist you in this process?

Definitions

By *curriculum*, we mean the WHAT of teaching. Your curriculum is made up of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are taught within the school system. These include the broad goals established by school leaders as well as the more narrowly-defined daily objectives developed by teachers and others. Curriculum is *not* the HOW of teaching. That's instruction—the methods and the materials your teachers use.

Who determines curriculum?

Traditionally—or so board members have been told—curriculum is the province of professional educators—administrators and teachers. For three-quarters of a century or more that has been true, but in the 1800s and again in recent years, school boards were and are intricately involved in determining what should be taught in the schools. The pendulum swung away from education's early era in North America when local boards prescribed the curriculum to the late 1800s when boards began hiring superintendents and other administrators to whom this responsibility was delegated. Several generations later, the curriculum turf began to be trod again by board members who recognized this fundamental aspect of education as being a key responsibility of school boards.

A 1981 NSBA Research Report, *The School Board and the Instructional Program*, contains the following review:

> Contemporary writers maintain that boards of education should not only prescribe what goes on in the schools but also they should be actively involved in confirming that policies are followed and goals are met. Most of today's writers in the field of education believe that, in order for school boards to provide the best possible school program in their districts, board members must devote more of their time and energy to monitoring the instructional program. The general opinion is that school boards must pay more attention to what is being taught, by whom, how, and with what results in their districts even though actual administrative duties would still remain in the domain of superintendents.

Increasingly, curriculum is becoming the province of the public at large. The entire community's educational goals should form the basis for what is taught in the schools. The board's role is one of interfacing community goals with the available human and economic resources necessary to implement the curriculum. But just what are the goals of a particular community?

Determining community goals

Certainly valuable input should come from administrators and teachers. They are, after all, the front-line participants in the process of inculcating the curriculum from one student generation to the next. But they—no more than board members themselves—have no lock on the community's ever-changing needs and values. How, though, can a board determine the expectations of its community—including parents and nonparents (i.e., childless couples or those without school-age children), students, graduates, business leaders, and others?

One tool you can use is the Educational Goals Assessment (EGA), which is available through the National School Boards Association.

How EGA works

EGA is a survey composed of four questionnaires containing 275 spe-

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Regina H. Paul and Henry M. Brickell of Policy Studies in Education (New York City) developed the goal survey service described in this article.

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cific learning goals that could be accomplished by the time a student is graduated from high school. Each questionnaire contains a representative sample of those 275 specific learning goals, so that no one respondent has to spend more than 30 minutes completing a questionnaire. For each goal, the respondent decides how important it is for *students to learn*, how important it is for *schools to teach*, and whether it is so important that it should be *required for high school graduation*.

The goals cover 13 school subjects and 11 life areas. Life areas include basic skills, creative and critical thinking, jobs and careers, citizenship, fine arts, and self-understanding. About 60 percent of the goals describe knowledge, 30 percent describe attitudes, and 10 percent describe physical skills—because all three kinds of goals are sought in schools.

The goals are specific enough to guide major curriculum decisions, without being so detailed that they do the work of the teachers' unit and lesson planning. They are written to be understood by citizens and students. Here is a sample:

- Knows the different types, sources, and costs of energy
- Judges competing political candidates and their views
- Evaluates his/her own actions and work
- Believes in free enterprise
- Chooses a place for music, dance, drama, or visual arts in his/her life
- Plays on sports teams for recreation
- Prefers to live in a racially integrated community
- Can read and interpret literature in a second language
- Knows the effects of alcohol and tobacco
- Invents new approaches to difficult problems
- Describes the economic systems of major nations
- Speaks well in public
- Thinks scientifically—hypothesizes, experiments, analyzes, and concludes
- Sets realistic personal goals
- Uses a hand calculator.

When respondents are asked how important it is for a student to learn a specific skill, for instance, they must consider the many people and places available to help the student learn that skill. We all know that students learn from their parents, their siblings, their peers, their neighbors, and from watching television. They learn in their homes, their places of worship, the Scouts, the YMCA, and in the streets. They learn, then, from many individuals who are not professional teachers and in many places that are not schoolrooms.

We also know that the school's primary function is to teach students a variety of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The answer to the second question, "how important is it for the schools to teach this goal," pinpoints what respondents believe to be the mission of the schools. It can be quite different from what you might expect.

For example, a goal such as "accepts responsibility for his/her own behavior" usually receives a high rating on importance for *students to learn* and a significantly lower rating on importance for *schools to teach*. That means the respondents believe that parents, peers, neighbors, Scout leaders, and the clergy should and will do their part in helping students learn to accept responsibility for their own behavior.

The EGA responses help the school officials sort out the community's responsibilities and the schools' responsibilities. The survey results point out that board members, administrators, and teachers neither individually nor collectively—are responsible for all student learning. Education is a community function.

Respondents also are asked to decide whether each goal is so important that a student should not be graduated from high school if he cannot master a particular skill. The answers to this question dramatically show which goals the schools should work hardest to help their students achieve.

The survey ends with two "games": A money game in which respondents take $1,000 and spend it across the 11 life areas to show their curriculum priorities among those areas; and, a time game, in which respondents take 1,000 hours of school time and spread it across the 13 school subjects to show their curriculum priorities. Just as in real life, there is *never* enough money or time. But, when forced, respondents make choices and are quite clear about what they want from their schools.

Common graduation requirements

Among the list of 13 graduation requirements chosen most frequently by school systems that have conducted an EGA are: computes accurately, knows the fundamentals of mathematics, reads with understanding, and writes correctly. (See box.)

Given that information, school systems that have participated in an EGA must rethink their policy on graduation requirements and the number of credits required. They need to think beyond the state minimum requirements to what is best for their students—in the judgment of community residents, staff members, students, and recent graduates who are now trying to use what they have been taught, either at institutions of higher learning or on the job.

Other findings

No two school systems are exactly alike, and no one can accurately predict what you would find out about curriculum priorities if you assessed your school system publics with an EGA. School systems from Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake, N.Y., to Seat-

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Here's a list of the 13 graduation requirements chosen most frequently by school systems that have conducted an EGA, along with the average percentage of respondents selecting each goal. This is a combined percentage of residents, staff members, students, and recent graduates who agreed that the goal should be required for high school graduation:

Graduation Requirements	*Average Percent of Respondents Selecting Each Goal*
• Computes accurately (adds, subtracts, multiplies, and divides)	95
• Knows the fundamentals of mathematics	95
• Reads with understanding	90
• Writes correctly (proper grammar, punctuation, and capitalization)	85
• Solves mathematical problems in practical situations	80
• Speaks correctly	80
• Spells correctly	80
• Reads to learn	75
• Writes in a clear and organized fashion	70
• Can follow written and oral directions	70
• Knows American history	65
• Believes in having good mathematical skills	65
• Knows basic facts and principles of biology	60

tle and Tacoma, Wash., have conducted EGA's and the results prompted them to change their priorities, programs, and policies. Here's what some of these school systems have learned:

• Foreign languages were the least important subjects in the curriculum according to the residents, staff members, students, and recent graduates of one school system. The school board members and their key administrators felt these opinions were out of line with the necessities of getting ahead in an international labor market as well as in the labor market within their community, which had many foreign-speaking families and businesses. Instead of cutting its language program, the board launched a two-year public awareness campaign on the importance of foreign languages and effectively doubled foreign language enrollment in two years. Board members said that had they not had the information on what people thought about foreign languages, they would not have had a chance to turn around that situation before foreign languages drifted out of the curriculum.

Another school system learned that its third- and fourth-year language classes were losing enrollment because they were focusing on the wrong skills. Consumers were interested in learning how to speak a second language, while course content was heavy on reading and interpreting literature. Making the switch to give advanced students better speaking skills would hold students to the language classes offered. In both these school systems, a policy statement on developing a strong foreign language program, delineating its aims, also would be needed based on the measures taken as a result of the EGA.

• Health turned out to be the most important subject after English and mathematics in another school system. Looking at the 16 specific learning goals represented by the subject of health, it was easy to see that respondents were concerned about sex and alcohol use, followed at some distance by drug and tobacco use. Having good health habits, maintaining physical fitness, knowing how to obtain medical and dental attention were not the targets of community concern. Respondents wanted students to be taught the causes and consequences of pregnancy, the effects of alcohol and the emotional and social aspects of human sexuality. The consequence was the institution of a new health course for junior high students. In making up the curriculum, the board listened closely to the community's concerns. To further support its health education priority, this school board should be sure its policy statement on health education reflects the curriculum changes it has made.

• Art and music were the least important subjects in another school system.

The board could have cut those courses out of the curriculum and risked very little negative feedback from the community. However, the board looked at the 19 specific learning goals that represented the subjects of art and music in order to decide whether anything in those two subjects was essential. The closer look showed that community members were interested in learning "spectator" art and music—that is, helping students to become good spectators of the arts rather than good performers. It was not painting, drawing, sculpting, playing an instrument, or singing well that was important. It was not wanting to take music, dance, drama, or visual arts lessons. It was appreciating the talents of artists; it was being able to use skills in music, dance, drama, or visual arts in life. The school system planned to speak to its art and music teachers, to work on revamping their curricula to be more attractive to more consumers, and, as a result, to get the arts out of last place.

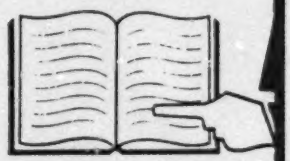
Supportive policies

What curriculum policies do you have in your district that go beyond your state mandated functions—typically, selecting textbooks (which is really *instruction*, not *curriculum*) and setting the number of credits required for high school graduation?

You will need a policy on curriculum development, which recognizes the board's role in this process.

Additionally, you will need a policy on what *learning* you want to require for graduation—not merely the listing of courses to be completed for a high school diploma. Such a policy should specify how learning will be measured (by test or by teacher judgment, for example), how frequently that learning should be measured, and what to do with students who do not meet your expectations.

Other policies relating to curriculum development, curriculum research, and instructional programs should be developed/revised in order to enhance the timely and effective delivery of a curriculum that serves your community needs.



More about EGA

NSBA, in conjunction with Policy Studies in Education, offers the Educational Goals Assessment (EGA) as a service to help you identify your community's educational priorities. Available only through NSBA, EGA surveys the attitudes and opinions of residents, students, school staff, and recent graduates. It can help:

- build better school-community relations.
- improve and update your curriculum.
- provide the school management team with information vital to the curricular and budgetary decisions that are or should be faced.
- update and improve your school system's testing program.

This copyrighted survey consists of a two-part questionnaire. Part one has respondents rank 275 learning and teaching goals. Part two has them tell you how they would allocate funds among 13 curriculum areas.

For more information, write Phyllis Edelman, NSBA, 1055 Thomas Jefferson St., N.W., Washington, DC 20007.

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